



49.1975.1 Mary Bryan, Pioneer Woman
Marion County
Marker Text Review Report
03/13/2013

Marker Text

Mary Bryan, one of the first American women to cross the Cumberland Mountains (c. 1776), is buried here with Samuel, her husband, a Revolutionary War veteran, who settled in Perry Township in 1830.

Report

Current IHB guidelines require primary documentation to support all information on a marker. The “Mary Bryan, Pioneer Woman” marker has been reviewed because IHB had few sources on file to support the text. Additionally, IHB now avoids the use of subjective and superlative terms such as “first,” “only,” and “most.” Such claims often are not verifiable and/or require extensive qualification to be accurate. This is the case with the marker’s statement that Mary Bryan was “one of the first American women to cross the Cumberland Mountains.” This statement is also misleading since it makes no reference to the countless American Indians who had been crossing the Cumberland Mountains for hundreds of years.

Regarding the accuracy of the marker text:

- According to marriage records, Mary Hunt married Samuel Bryan in North Carolina in 1775.¹ Sources disagree on the year, but report that Samuel enlisted in the Continental Army sometime between 1775 and 1777, and “served at various times” through the early 1780s.²
- Mary Bryan was among the early pioneers to cross the Cumberland Mountains, but the year in which she did so is unclear. In a transcribed copy of Samuel Bryan’s application for a pension, dated August 18, 1832, Bryan reported that he and his family moved from North Carolina to Kentucky in 1779 (not 1776 as listed on the marker). In making this move, Samuel and Mary Bryan might have traveled through the Cumberland Mountains, which served as the “doorway to the West” for thousands of pioneers from the late 1700s through the early 1800s.³
- Bryan’s pension application also shows that he and Mary migrated to Marion County, Indiana sometime between 1830 and 1832.⁴
- Cemetery records confirm that Mary and Samuel Bryan were buried in Southport Cemetery in Marion County.⁵

To learn more about early settlers’ experiences crossing the Cumberland Mountains as they traveled westward, see Frances Higgins, “The Wilderness Road,” *Indiana Magazine of History* (March 1917): 56-59; “The Wilderness Road,” History.com; and “Cumberland Gap: Doorway to the West,” Kentucky’s National Parks, KET.org.

For information on Indiana during the pioneer period, see Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1998).

¹ “U.S. and International Marriage Records, 1560-1900,” accessed AncestryLibrary.com.

² “Records of Revolutionary Soldiers Surnames, A-B,” accessed AncestryLibrary.com; “Pension Application of Samuel Bryan W9366,” *Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements*, transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris; Hazel Atterbury Spraker, *The Boone Family: A Genealogical History of the Descendants of George and Mary Boone Who Came to America in 1717* (Rutland, VT: The Tuttle Company, 1922), accessed Archive.org;



David C. McMurtry, John K. Bryan, Jr., et al., *Mary Hunt Bryan, 1759-1842: 'A Pioneer Woman' of North Carolina, Kentucky and Indiana* (Lexington, KY: Mil-Mac Publishers, 2004).

The "Records of Revolutionary Soldiers Surnames, A-B" and *The Boone Family* genealogical study report that Bryan enlisted in 1775 shortly after marrying Mary Hunt. However, in Bryan's application for a pension, dated August 18, 1832, he states that he enlisted in 1777. McMurtry's genealogical study also uses the 1777 date.

³ "Pension Application of Samuel Bryan W9366;" "Cumberland Gap National Historical Park," [National Park Foundation](#); McMurtry, *Mary Hunt Bryan*.

David McMurtry, a descendent of the Bryan family, confirms the 1779 date in his genealogical study of Mary Hunt Bryan and her family. Using deeds, tax lists, and church records, among other sources, McMurtry states that after their initial move in 1779, Mary and Samuel Bryan moved back to North Carolina in 1780, but returned to Kentucky in 1786. Further research outside the scope of this review project is needed to verify these claims.

⁴ "Pension Application of Samuel Bryan W9366;" McMurtry, *Mary Hunt Bryan*, 11.

In his pension application, Samuel Bryan reported that as of January 1, 1830, he and Mary and their children were living in Campbell County, Kentucky. At the time of his application in 1832, he described himself as a resident of Marion County, Indiana; and in an addendum to the application in 1834, he stated that he and Mary and some of their children were living in Marion County.

⁵ "Southport Cemetery, Marion County, Indiana," [Interment.net](#); "Mary Bryan," [Find a Grave](#); Berry Robinson Sulgrove, *History of Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana*, pt. 2 (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), 583-584, accessed [Google Books](#); McMurtry, *Mary Hunt Bryan*, 22, 90.

According to Sulgrove and McMurtry, both Mary and Samuel were originally buried on the farm of their son, Luke Bryan, but were later moved to Southport (formerly known as Old Southport) Cemetery.